

Virginia Interagency ADR Council Pilot Presentations

Community Involvement Initiative
Department of Environmental Quality
June 29, 2005

Pilot Overview

■ Goals

- Meet agency's strategic goal of an "informed and engaged community"
- Improve ability to work with conservation community towards common goals
- Involve public in significant environmental actions
- Increase public understanding of DEQ
- Enhance DEQ's ability to meet public expectations

■ Participants

- Leaders in Virginia conservation community
- Agency director, staff from key agency programs

Steps Taken

- Appointed Community Involvement Task Force
 - Equal number of conservation community leaders and agency staff
 - Used neutral facilitator
- Task Force charged with
 - Identifying areas of concern and opportunities for improvement (for both agency and stakeholders)
 - Developing agency policy to articulate goals
 - Developing action plan to implement recommendations from the task force

Steps Taken, cont'd.

- Inform and educate agency staff on new approach and priorities
 - Active support of agency director
 - Continued communication
 - Involve staff in identifying ways to improve efforts
 - Training and support
- Regional open houses
- Regional Community Involvement Plans
- Track implementation of work plan
- Provide feedback to task force members and agency staff

Supporting Conditions & Challenges

■ Supporting Conditions & Impact

- Shared commitment to environmental protection
- Shared commitment to public involvement in environmental protection
- Recognition of mutual benefits if efforts were successful

■ Challenges & Solutions

- Initial mistrust, lack of understanding
 - Use of neutral facilitator
 - Perseverance

Implementing the New ADR Process

■ How It Works

- Develop strategy and implementation plan with internal and external stakeholders
- Demonstrate commitment to goals
 - policy statement and work-plan
- Provide training and support for agency staff
- Focused community-based outreach and education
- Identify and share successes

■ Roll Out to Stakeholders

- Initiate efforts with leaders from primary stakeholder groups and agency programs
- Provide information to external and internal stakeholders
- Community open houses and meetings in regional offices
- Work together on areas of mutual interest

Results Produced

■ Better?

- Improved involvement
 - Better public comments, better environmental protection
 - 350+ participants in regional open houses
- Improved ability to work towards common goals
- Increased understanding and support for agency efforts

■ Faster?

- Reduced regulatory permit hearings
- Increased trust in agency actions

■ Cheaper?

- Relatively small investment to improve public access to information
- Early efforts to identify and address community concerns reduce staff time spent on contentious issues
- Collaborative approach to problem solving is cheaper than litigation

Lessons Learned

- This approach required a change in agency culture
- Leadership commitment is essential
- Trust the process, though it can be difficult
- Solicit support, involvement from external stakeholders and agency staff
- Identification of success stories and benefits of efforts – from internal and external perspective – is essential
- The potential benefits are immense